



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

NEWS RELEASE

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(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus issued the following statement following the successful passage of the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act:

Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus Passage of Medicare Prescription Drug Legislation

Each year Congress considers hundreds of pieces of legislation. But rarely do we have the opportunity to pass a bill that has the power to as significantly affect millions of people's lives for the better as the bill we just passed will.

I am proud and honored to have been part of writing, negotiating, and finally passing of the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act. For the first time in our nation's history, our seniors will have universal, voluntary access to assistance with the cost of prescription drugs. No longer will they have to make dire choices between food and medicine. No longer will they have to ration their doses to make their medications last.

The final Senate and House Medicare compromise bill is a successful tapestry of many viewpoints. I owe thanks to the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Chuck Grassley, and to the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Bill Thomas. Senate Majority Leader Frist played a pivotal role in the final days of the negotiations and Senator John Breaux and I served together as the Senate Democrats at the bargaining table. I would also like to thank Senator Edward Kennedy and I am disappointed that he was unable to support the final bill. His expertise was essential in the creation and passage of the Senate version of the Medicare bill.

I look forward to seeing this bill change seniors lives -- in this generation and for generations to come. Our bill will ensure all seniors have affordable access to the drugs they need to *get healthy* and *stay healthy*. Starting in 2004, seniors will have access to prescription drug discount cards, with full benefits going into effect in 2006. Low-income beneficiaries will see especially generous benefits and those who qualify for Medicaid will also have access to the Medicare drug benefit.

For my state of Montana, I am especially pleased by the funding and assistance rural America will soon receive. This is the largest package ever considered by Congress for rural America, with \$25 billion in funding. Payment equity will be established, once and for all, for rural doctors and hospitals. It's only fair that rural and urban health care providers receive equal reimbursement levels for equal work.

The most important accomplishment we achieved with today's historic Medicare prescription drug vote is that we utilized the \$400 billion that was set aside for our nation's seniors. This funding opportunity may not have come our way again for a long time.

Now, is this a perfect bill? No.

But will it help seniors afford the prescription drugs they need to get and stay healthy? YES. And that's the bottom line. We now have the opportunity to build, improve and streamline our Medicare prescription drug program. By working together, we have achieved a banner victory for seniors across the nation. This is a landmark day and I'm proud to have been a part of it.

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